

4.4 Exercises

- 1 Does your language have sequences of two, three, four or more consonants? If so, list the ones which are similar to English sequences.
- 2 Does your language have stop + stop sequences? Practise again the examples on p. 69.
- 3 Be sure that you can distinguish the following: spy, espy; state, estate; scape, escape; support, sport; succumb, scum; polite, plight; terrain, train; below, blow; strange, estrange; ascribe, scribe; esquire, squire; astute, stewed; ticket, ticked; wrapped, rapid, wrap it.
- 4 Does your language have nasal explosion (p. 70) or lateral explosion (p. 72)? Practise those examples again.
- 5 Practise again all the other examples in this chapter, being very careful to follow the instructions given. Finish with the longer sequences on p. 77.

5 The vowels of English

Vowels are made by voiced air passing through different mouth-shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different positions of the tongue and of the lips. It is easy to see and to feel the lip differences, but it is very difficult to see or to feel the tongue differences, and that is why a detailed description of the tongue position for a certain vowel does not really help us to pronounce it well.

Vowels must be learned by *listening and imitating*: I could tell you that the English vowel /ɔ:/ as in *saw* is made by rounding the lips and by placing the back of the tongue in a position mid-way between the highest possible and the lowest possible position, but it would be much more helpful if I could simply say the sound for you and get you to imitate me. Since I cannot do this I must leave the listening and imitating to you. So spend some of your listening time on the vowels.

As I said at the beginning of chapter 3 English speakers vary quite a lot in their vowel sounds; the vowels used by an Australian, an American and a Scotsman in the word *see* are all different, but they are all recognized quite easily as /i:/. So the actual sounds that you use for the English vowels are not so important as the differences that you make between them. There must be *differences between* the vowels, and that is what we will concentrate on

5.1 Simple vowels

/i:, ɪ, e/

In your language you will have a vowel which is like the English /i:/ in *see*, and one which is like the English /ʌ/ in *sun*, and almost certainly one which is like the English /e/ in *get*. They may not be *exactly* the same as the English vowels you hear in listening to English, but they will do for a starting-point. Say the words bi:d *bead* and bed *bed* several times and listen carefully to the sound of the vowels; then try to say a vowel which is *between* the other two, and different from both, not bi:d and not bed, but . . . bi:d – that will be the vowel in *bid*. You need

three different vowels for the three words *bead*, *bid* and *bed*. Be sure that the middle vowel is *different* and *between* the other two: one thing which will help you to distinguish /i:/ from /ɪ/ is that /i:/ is longer than /ɪ/ as well as different in the quality of the sound. Practise those three words (and listen for them in English) until you are sure that you can keep them separate. The most likely difficulty is that you will confuse /i:/ with /ɪ/, so be sure that /ɪ/ is nearer in quality to /e/ and that it is always shorter than /i:/.

Remember that when the vowels are followed by a strong consonant they are shorter than when they are followed by a weak consonant, so that *beat*, *bit* and *bet* all have shorter vowels than *bead*, *bid* and *bed*, but even so the vowel /i:/ is always longer than the vowels /ɪ/ and /e/ in any one set. Now practise the following sets and pay attention to both the length of the vowels and their quality:



li:ɪd	lead	liɪd	lid	led	led
wi:t	wheat	wɪt	wit	wet	wet
bi:n	been	bɪn	bin	ben	Ben
tʃi:k	cheek	tʃɪk	chick	tʃek	check
fi:l	feel	fɪl	fill	fel	fell
ri:tʃ	reach	rɪtʃ	rich	retʃ	wretch

/e, æ, ʌ/

Now you need another vowel between /e/ and /ʌ/, that is the vowel /æ/. Say the words *bed* *bed* and *bad* *bud* several times and be sure that your mouth is quite wide open for the vowel of *bad*. Listen to the vowels carefully and then try to say a vowel which is *between* those two, a vowel which sounds a bit like /e/ and a bit like /ʌ/ but which is different from both. You *must* have different vowels in *bed*, *bad* and *bud*. Practise those three words until you can always make a difference between them; they all have comparatively short vowels so that length differences will not help you here.

Practise the following sets and be sure that each word really sounds different:



ten	ten	tæn	tan	tʌn	ton
bet	bet	bæt	bat	bʌt	but
pen	pen	pæn	pan	pʌn	pun
seks	sex	sæks	sacks	sʌks	sucks
ded	dead	dæd	Dad	dʌd	dud
meʃ	mesh	mæʃ	mash	mʌʃ	mush

/i:, ɪ, e, æ, ʌ/

Now try all five of these vowels in the sets given below: you will see that there are gaps in some of the sets, where no word exists, for instance there is no word *lek*; but for practice you can fill in the gaps too. Some of the words are rather uncommon, but don't worry about the meanings just be sure that the vowel sounds are different:



bi:d	bead	biɪd	bid	bed	bed	bæd	bad	bʌd	bud
li:k	leak	liɪk	lick			læk	lack	lʌk	luck
hi:l	heel	hiɪl	hill	hel	hell	hæl	Hal	hʌl	hull
ti:n	teen	tiɪn	tin	ten	ten	tæn	tan	tʌn	ton
ni:t	neat	nɪt	knit	net	net	næt	gnat	nʌt	nut
li:st	least	liɪst	list	lest	lest			lʌst	lust
ri:m	ream	riɪm	rim			ræm	ram	rʌm	rum
bi:t	beat	biɪt	bit	bet	bet	bæt	bat	bʌt	but

/ʌ, ɑ:, ɒ/

In England when the doctor wants to look into your mouth and examine your throat he asks you to say *Ah*, that is the vowel /ɑ:/, because for this vowel the tongue is very low and he can see over it to the back of the palate and the pharynx. So if you have no vowel exactly like /ɑ:/ in your language you may find a mirror useful keep your mouth wide open and play with various vowel sounds until you find one which allows you to see the very back of the soft palate quite clearly; this will be similar to an English /ɑ:/, but you must compare it with the /ɑ:/ vowels that you hear when you listen to English and adjust your sound if necessary. Remember that /ɑ:/ is a long vowel. The short vowel /ɒ/ is a bit like /ɑ:/ in quality though of course they must be kept separate. For /ɒ/ the lips may be slightly rounded, for /ɑ:/ they are not. Try the following sets:




lʌk	luck	lɑ:k	lark	lɒk	lock
kʌd	cud	kɑ:d	card	kɒd	cod
dʌk	duck	dɑ:k	dark	dɒk	dock
lʌst	lust	lɑ:st	last	lɒst	lost
bʌks	bucks	bɑ:ks	barks	bɒks	box
kʌp	cup	kɑ:p	carp	kɒp	cop

/ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:/

In your language there will be a vowel which is similar to the English


/u:/ in *two*. The /u:/ in English, like /i:/ and /ɑ:/, is always longer than the other vowels. Between /ɒ/ and /u:/ you need to make two other vowels, /ɔ:/, a long one, as in /lɔ:/ *law*, and /ʊ/, a short one, as in *put*. For /ɔ:/ the mouth is less open than for /ɒ/ and the lips are more rounded, but /ɔ:/ is nearer in quality to /ɒ/ than to /u:/. For /ʊ/ the lips are also rounded, but the sound is nearer in quality to /u:/. All four vowels, /ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:/, must be kept separate, and the differences of length will help in this. Try the following sets:

	ʃɒd shod	ʃɔ:d shored	ʃʊd should	ʃu:d shoed
	kɒd cod	kɔ:d cord	kʊd could	ku:d coed
	wɒd wad	wɔ:d ward	wʊd would	wu:d wooed
	lɒk lock		lʊk look	lu:k Luke
	pɒl Poll	pɔ:l Paul	pʊl pull	pu:l pool

/ɜ:, ɑ:/

The vowel /ɜ:/ as in /hɜ:/ *her* is a long vowel which is not very close in quality to any of the other vowels and usually sounds rather vague and indistinct to the foreign learner. You must listen to the vowel especially carefully and try to imitate the indistinctness of it (though to an English listener it sounds quite distinct!). Two things will help: keep your teeth quite close together and do not round your lips at all – smile when you say it! The two commonest mistakes with /ɜ:/ are, first, to replace it by /er/ or by some vowel in your own language which has lip-rounding but which is not likely to be confused with any other English vowel, and second, and more important, it is replaced by /ɑ:/ by Japanese speakers and speakers of many African languages and others. In the first case there is no danger of misunderstanding although the vowel will sound strange; in the second case there is danger of misunderstanding, since words like hɜ:t *hurt* and hɑ:t *heart* will be confused.

In your listening-time pay special attention to /ɜ:/ and experiment (always with teeth close together and a smile on your face) until you approach the right quality; then make sure that you can distinguish it from /ɑ:/ which has the teeth further apart in the following pairs:

	pɜ:s purse	pɑ:s pass	bɜ:n burn	bɑ:n barn
	hɜ:d heard	hɑ:d hard	fɜ:m firm	fɑ:m farm
	pɜ:tʃt perched	pɑ:tʃt parched	lɜ:ks lurks	lɑ:ks larks

/ə/


The vowel /ə/ in bənɑ:nə *banana* is the commonest of the English

vowels and is a short version of /ɜ:/. It is particularly short and indistinct when it is not final, e.g. in əgen *again*, kənteɪn *contain*, pəʊstmən *postman*. In final position, that is before a pause, as in betə *better*, eɪʃə *Asia*, kɒlə *collar*, the vowel sounds more like /ʌ/, though it is not usually so clear.


There are two main difficulties with this vowel: first, to identify it, that is, to know when it is this vowel you should be aiming at; and second, to get the right quality. In the first case, do not be deceived by English spelling: there is no single letter which always stands for this vowel, so rely on your ear – listen very carefully and you will hear dozens of examples of /ə/ in every bit of English you listen to. In the second case, it is often useful to think of leaving out the vowel altogether in words such as kəndem *condemn*, sætədɪ *Saturday*, dʒentlmən *gentleman*, where /ə/ comes between consonants. Of course, you will not really leave out the vowel, but you will have a minimum vowel and that is what /ə/ is. Then in initial position, as in ətempt *attempt*, əkaʊnt *account*, əbzɜ:v *observe*, you must again keep it very short and very obscure. But in final position it need not be so short and it may be more like /ʌ/, with the mouth a little more open than in other positions.

Try the following examples:

In medial position

	pəhæps perhaps	kənteɪn contain
	entəteɪn entertain	ɪmbærəs embarrass
	dɪnəz dinners	hɪndəd hindered
	æmətɜ: amateur	glæmərəs glamorous
	kəmfətəbəl comfortable	kəmpəʊnənt component
	ɪgnərənt ignorant	kærəktɜ: characters
	ʌndəstænd understand	menəs menace
	pɑɪlət pilot	terəbəl terrible
	pɜ:mənənt permanent	kəreɪdʒəs courageous

In initial position

	əbeɪ obey	ətend attend
	əlaʊ allow	əbstrʌkt obstruct
	əmaʊnt amount	ətʃi:v achieve
	ədɔ: adore	əkaʊnt account
	ənɔɪ annoy	əsɑɪd aside
	əpru:v approve	əgri: agree

əpɪə appear
əfens offence

ədʒɜːn adjourn

In final position



sʊːnə sooner
meɪʒə measure
sʌlfə sulphur
æfrɪkə Africa
pɜːʃə Persia
flætərə flatterer
kʌlə colour
pɪktʃə picture
məːdələ murderer

seɪlə sailor
kɒlə collar
ʃəʊfə chauffeur
əmerɪkə America
kænədə Canada
ədmaɪərə admirer
zefə zephyr
tʃaɪnə China
kəmpəʊzə composer

More examples of /ə/ will be found in the next chapter when we consider the *weak forms* of certain words, such as *at* and *for* in *ət taɪmz at times* and *fə juː for you*.

5.2 Diphthongs

A diphthong is a glide from one vowel to another, and the whole glide acts like one of the long, simple vowels; so we have *bɪː*, *bɑː*, *bɔː* and also *beɪ*, *bəʊ*, *baɪ*, *baʊ*, *bɔɪ*, *bɪə*, *beə*, *bʊə*. The diphthongs of English are in three groups: those which end in /ʊ/, /əʊ, aʊ/, those which end in /ɪ/, /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/, and those which end in /ə/, /ɪə, eə, ʊə/.

/əʊ, aʊ/

Both these diphthongs end with /ʊ/ rather than /uː/ although you will not be misunderstood if you do use /uː/. To get /əʊ/ as in *səʊ so*, start with /sɜː/ and then glide away to /ʊ/ with the lips getting slightly rounded and the sound becoming less loud as the glide progresses. Be sure that the first part of the diphthong is /ɜː/ (a real English /ɜː/!) and not /ɔː/ or anything like it, and be sure that the sound *is* a diphthong, not a simple vowel of the /ɔː/ type. /əʊ/ and /ɔː/ must be kept quite separate. Try the following:



ləʊ low	lɔː law	səʊ so	sɔː saw
snəʊ snow	snɔː snore	bəʊt boat	bɔːt bought
kləʊz close	klɔːz claws	kəʊk coke	kɔːk cork
kəʊl coal	kɔːl call		

For /aʊ/ start with /ʌ/. Say *tʌn ton*, and then after the /ʌ/-sound add an /ʊ/; this should give *taʊn town*. /aʊ/ is not difficult for most people. Be sure that /aʊ/ and /əʊ/ are different. Try the following:



naʊ now	nəʊ know
laʊd loud	ləʊd load
faʊnd found	fəʊnd phoned
raʊ row (quarrel)	rəʊ row (line)
daʊt doubt	dəʊt dote
taʊnz towns	təʊnz tones

Remember when you practise these examples that diphthongs are shorter before strong consonants and longer before weak ones, just like the other vowels, so *bəʊt boat* has a shorter diphthong than *kləʊz close* and *daʊt doubt* a shorter one than *laʊd loud*. Go back over all those examples and get the lengths right. When no consonant follows, as in *ləʊ low*, the diphthong is at its longest.

/eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/

These diphthongs all end in /ɪ/, not /iː/ (though it is not serious if you do use /iː/ finally). /eɪ/ begins with /e/ as in *men*. Say *men* and then add /ɪ/ after /e/, gliding smoothly from /e/ to /ɪ/ and making the sound less loud as the glide progresses – this will give *meɪn main*. The most common mistake is to use a long, simple vowel, so try to be sure that there is a glide from /e/ to /ɪ/; however, if you do use a simple vowel for /eɪ/ it will not be misunderstood – some accents of English (e.g. Scottish) do the same. But /eɪ/ and /e/ must be quite separate. Try the following:



leɪt late	let let	seɪl sail	seɪl sell
peɪpə paper	pepə pepper	treɪd trade	tred tread
reɪk rake	rek wreck	feɪl fail	fel fell


/aɪ/ glides from /ʌ/ to /ɪ/, and the loudness becomes less as the glide progresses. Say *fʌn fun*, and then add /ɪ/ after the /ʌ/, with a smooth glide; this will give you *fʌɪn fine*. Be sure that /aɪ/ is separate from /eɪ/:



waɪt white	wert wait	laɪd lied	leɪd laid
raɪs rice	reɪs race	raɪz rise	reɪz raise
laɪk like	leɪk lake	faɪl file	feɪl fail


/ɔɪ/ glides from /ɔː/ to /ɪ/, and as usual the loudness becomes less during

the glide. Say **dʒɔ:** *jaw* and then add /ɪ/, as before. This will give you /dʒɔɪ/ *joy*. The /ɔ:/ sound is not as long in /ɔɪ/ as it is when it is alone, as in /dʒɔ:/ . /ɔɪ/ is not a very common diphthong and it is not likely to be confused with any other vowel or diphthong. Try these words:

 bɔɪ boy	tɔɪ toy	əˈnɔɪ annoy	nɔɪz noise
ɔɪl oil	dʒɔɪn join	əˈvɔɪd avoid	bɔɪlz boils
vɔɪs voice	hɔɪst hoist	dʒɔɪnt joint	lɔɪtə loiter


/ɪə, eə, ʊə/

These are all glides to the sort of /ə/-sound found in final position, as described on p. 83. /ɪə/ glides from /ɪ/ (not /i:/) to this /ə/ in words like **hɪə** *hear*, **nɪə** *near*, etc. If you do use /i:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:


 ɪə ear	jɪə year	bɪə beer	klɪə clear
fɪə fear	rɪəl real	bɪəd beard	aɪdɪəz ideas
kæriən Korean	fɪəs fierce	pɪəs pierce	nɪərə nearer
rɪəlɪ really			

Words such as **fʌnɪə** *funnier* and **glɔːrɪəs** *glorious*, where /ɪə/ is the result of adding an ending /ə/ or /əs/ to a word which ends with /ɪ/, should be pronounced in the same way as the /ɪə/ in *hear*, *near*, etc. The same is true for words such as **ɪndɪə** *India*, **eəriə** *area*, **juːniən** *union*, etc.

To make /eə/, start with the word **hæz** *has* (with the proper English /æ/, between /e/ and /ʌ/) and then add /ʌ/ after the /æ/, gliding smoothly from /æ/ to /ʌ/; this will give you the word **heəz** *hairs*. Notice that the beginning of the diphthong is /æ/ rather than /e/. You must keep /ɪə/ and /eə/ quite separate; try the following:

 hɪə here	heə hair	bɪə beer	beə bare
stɪəd steered	steəd stared	ɪəz ears	eəz airs
rɪəlɪ really	reəlɪ rarely	wɪəri weary	weəri wary

/ʊə/ starts from /ʊ/ (not /u:/) and glides to /ə/; if you use /u:/ at the beginning of the glide it will sound a bit strange but you will not be misunderstood. Try the following:


 pʊə poor	ɪnʃʊərəns insurance
ʃʊəlɪ surely	kjʊəriɒsəti curiosity
fjʊəriəs furious	kjʊə cure

pjʊə pure	tʊərɪst tourist
ʃʊə sure	pjʊəlɪ purely


All these words may also be pronounced with /ɔ:/ instead of /ʊə/ in R.P., /pɔ:/, /ʃɔ:/, /kɔ:/, etc. Other words, like *fewer*, *bluer*, *continuous*, are also usually pronounced with /ʊə/ **fjʊə**, **blʊə**, **kəntɪnjuəs** though they can always be pronounced with /u:ə/ **fju:ə**, **blu:ə**, **kəntɪnju:əs** – and in any case they must not be pronounced with /ɔ:/ . This is also true for *cruel* and *jewel* which must have either /ʊə/ or /u:ə/.

5.3 Vowel sequences

There are vowel sequences as well as consonant sequences but they are not so difficult. In general, when one vowel (or diphthong) follows another you should pronounce each one quite normally but with a smooth glide between them. The most common sequences are formed by adding /ə/ to a diphthong, especially to /aɪ/ and /aʊ/ in words like **faɪə** *fire* and **aʊə** *our*. When you listen to these two sequences **/aɪə, aʊə/** you will notice that the /ɪ/ in *fire* and the /ʊ/ in *our* are rather weak; in fact both sequences may sound rather like **/ɑ:/**. It is probably best for you not to imitate this but to pronounce the sequences as **/aɪ + ə/** and **/aʊ + ə/**, though the /ɪ/ and the /ʊ/ should not be made too strong. Try the following:

 taɪə tyre	taʊə tower
traɪəl trial	traʊəl trowel
kwaɪət quiet	taɪəd tired
kauəd coward	paʊəfʊl powerful
baɪə buyer	baʊə bower
flaɪə flyer	flaʊə flower
aɪən iron	raɪət riot
aʊəz ours	ʃaʊəri showery

The less common sequences **/eɪə, əʊə, ɔɪə/** should be pronounced with the normal diphthong smoothly followed by /ə/. The /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ need not be weakened at all. Try:

 greɪə greyer	ɪmplɔɪə employer
grəʊə grower	θrəʊə thrower
pleɪə player	bɪtreɪəl betrayal
rɔɪəl royal	lɔɪəz lawyers
fɒləʊəz followers	

/i:/ and /u:/ are also followed by /ə/ in words like *freer* and *bluer* which may be pronounced *fri:ə* or *frɪə*, and *blu:ə* or *blʊə*, as we have seen.

The verb ending *-ing* /ɪŋ/ gives various sequences in words like the following:



bi:ɪŋ	being	si:ɪŋ	seeing
du:ɪŋ	doing	stju:ɪŋ	stewing
əlaʊɪŋ	allowing	baʊɪŋ	bowing
drɔ:ɪŋ	drawing	sɔ:ɪŋ	sawing
gəʊɪŋ	going	nəʊɪŋ	knowing

In words like *saying*, *enjoying*, *flying*, where *-ing* follows a word ending with /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/ or /aɪ/, it is common to pronounce *seɪŋ*, *ɪndʒɔɪŋ*, *flaɪŋ*, if you find this easier.

In words like *carrying*, *pitying*, etc., where a word which ends with /ɪ/ has /ɪŋ/ added to it, it is usual (and best for you) to pronounce *kæri:ɪŋ*, *pɪti:ɪŋ*, etc., although *kæri* and *pɪti* are the normal forms.

Other vowel sequences are found both within words and between words. These also should be performed with a smooth glide between the vowels. (See also p. 101.) Here are some examples:



keɪɒs	chaos	rʊɪn	ruin
bɪɒnd	beyond	rɪækt	react
blu:ɪʃ	bluish	greɪ aɪd	grey-eyed
ðɪ: end	the end	maɪ əʊn	my own

baɪɒgrəfi	biography
kəʊpəreɪt	co-operate
ju: a:nt	you aren't
gəʊ aʊt	go out

tu: aʊəz two hours
meɪ aɪ əʊ ɪt tu: ju: may I owe it to you?

5.4 Exercises

(Answers, where appropriate, on p. 135)

- 1 What vowels and diphthongs do you have in your language? Which of the English ones cause you difficulty?
- 2 During your listening-time listen carefully to one of the difficult vowels at a time and try to get the sound of it into your head. Make a list of twenty words containing each difficult vowel and practise them.

- 3 Go back and practise all the examples given in this chapter, and concentrate on making *differences* between the different vowels.
- 4 Is the length of vowels important in your language? Practise making the difference between the long vowels (including the diphthongs) and the short vowels of English. Don't forget that vowel length is affected by following strong and weak consonants; complete the following list for all the vowels and practise it, thinking about vowel length:

bi:d	bi:t
hɪz	hɪs
sed	set
- 5 Make a list of phrases like the ones on p. 88, where a vowel or diphthong at the end of one word is immediately followed by another at the beginning of the next. Practise saying them smoothly, with no break between the vowels.